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Pamphlets
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Richey, Matthew

A plea for the Confederation
the Colonies of British North Am

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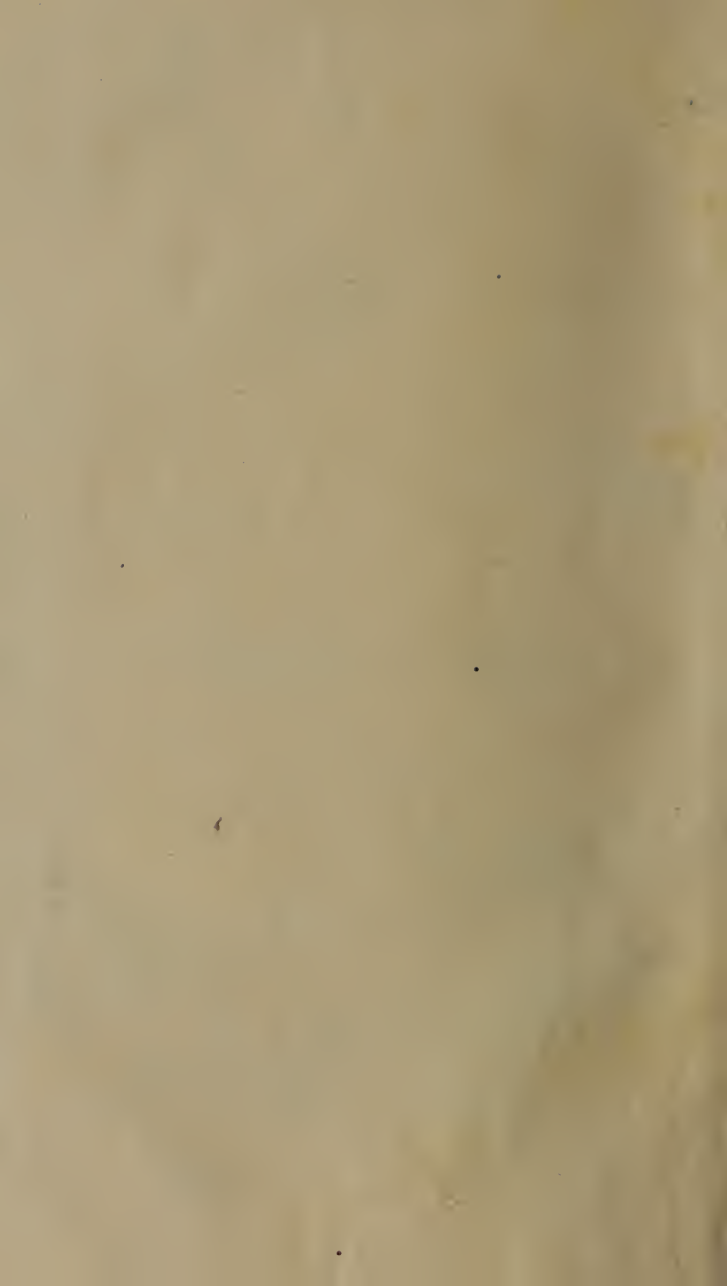
A PLEA
FOR THE
Confederation of the Colonies
OF
BRITISH NORTH AMERICA;
ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE AND PARLIAMENT
OF
Prince Edward Island.

BY
MATTHEW RICHEY, D. D.

He is the sincere and wisest friend of his country who is at all times ready on a crisis of importance, to give a temperate, yet a manly and decided testimony of his opinions.—GISBORNE.

CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. I.,
GEO. BREMNER, "EXCELSIOR PRINTING OFFICE,"
PRINCE STREET.

1867.



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TO HIS EXCELLENCY

GEORGE DUNDAS, ESQUIRE,

Lieutenant Governor & Commander-in-Chief

IN AND OVER

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND AND ITS DEPENDENCIES,

THE FOLLOWING PAGES—

IN THE DEVOUT AND FERVENT HOPE

THAT THE

MEMORY OF HIS EXCELLENCY'S ADMINISTRATION

MAY BE IMMORTALIZED BY ASSOCIATION

WITH THE ACHIEVEMENT

OF THE IMPORTANT MEASURE

WHICH THEY ARE DIFFIDENTLY INTENDED TO PROMOTE--

ARE, WITH PROFOUND RESPECT,

Inscribed

BY HIS OBEDIENT SERVANT,

MATTHEW RICHEY.

A
PLEA FOR THE CONFEDERATION
OF THE
Colonies of British North America.

ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE AND PARLIAMENT OF
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND.



FELLOW SUBJECTS :

AT a crisis of transition in the history of British North America, when its component Colonies, nurtured from infancy to adolescence by the fostering care of the Parent Government, are regarded by her most experienced and sagacious statesmen as having reached a stage of developement that clearly indicates the expediency and necessity of the inauguration of a new form of government and administration, it behooves every patriotic and loyal subject of our gracious Sovereign on this Island, dispassionately and with becoming deference, to weigh the grounds upon which Her Majesty's ministers so earnestly desiderate the adoption by all the Colonies concerned, of the general principles of Confederation enunciated in several important dispatches.

It can to no one be matter of surprise, that untoward events of recent occurrence, threatening the peace and security of these Colonies, and endangering their connection with the Parent State, have greatly increased the desire previously felt among all classes of political parties in Great Britain, that we should be bound together by the strong ligature of a common constitution, based upon the principles of equal justice to all, and adapted to promote the progressive prosperity of each.

The projected plan of our Union which, it is plain, can not any longer be denied our practical consideration, it is freely acknowledged, is one of imposing magnitude, and obviously fraught with momentous issues, alike to ourselves and to posterity. Be it remembered, however, that it has not been entertained by the statesmen of England, and offered to our consideration and acceptance without profound and protracted investigation—without having been contemplated in all its aspects and scrutinized in all its bearings and connections, immediate and remote, by minds as enlightened and discriminating as any on earth—minds, moreover, above all suspicion as to the disinterested character of the motives by which they are actuated in desiring the association in one brotherhood of Canada and these maritime Provinces.

Now, apart altogether from the intrinsic merits of the question at issue, is there no significance in the singular fact that on this subject, which con-

fessedly lies beyond the range of party politics, there exists at this moment among the most astute politicians of all parties in the mother country, a perfect coalescence of mind and heart? Does it not challenge recognition as at least *presumptive* evidence in favor of the proposed Confederation, that a DERBY and a RUSSEL—a GLADSTONE and a D'ISRAELI—a CARDWELL and a CARNARVON fully concur in judgment in respect to its imperious necessity, and that so intense is their solicitude to see it carried into effect, that in order to expedite the achievement of the magnificent design, they are mutually willing to proclaim a truce to their parliamentary campaign on other topics, and for a time, at least, to hang on high the furbished weapons of political gladiatorship? Can a fact so striking and suggestive be treated as trivial by any man of calm reflection? Is it to be imagined that the ministers of the Crown have all at once become so recreant to the solemn obligations which they owe alike to every colony whose interests are placed under their guardianship, that they have taken counsel together to deliver over this beautiful and fertile Island as a prey to the cunning and cupidity of Canadian politicians? And has Her Majesty Herself extinguished every sentiment and instinct of maternal solicitude for the welfare of the only dependency of the Crown in British North America that derives its designation from a member of the Royal Family? Has She, oblivious of the principles and precepts of

uncorrupted integrity, that have found their most conspicuous exemplification in her history hitherto, listened to the seductive counsels of some perfidious Ahithophel, and dimmed the lustre of her diadem by lending Her influence to aid the invaders of our chartered rights, and to force us from our loved tranquility into a political vortex in which we must inevitably perish? If such be the case, what wonder that the wily statesmen of Canada already exult in the anticipation of soon being able, by a legalized act of spoliation, to appropriate enough from our *surplus* revenue and the very overflowings of our treasury, to redeem their tottering credit, liquidate the debt incurred by their shameful extravagance, and recover from the financial paralysis which, as Dame MENDAX INFAMIA would have you believe, menaces them with imminent and ruinous bankruptcy!

If there is something too senile and absurd in such assumptions to impose upon the most simple, or to agitate the most suspicious, do we then claim superiority in mental acumen and political sagacity to those practiced and illustrious statesmen who surround the British throne, and wield with consummate ability the destinies of the mightiest empire the sun saw ever? Are they, with all the advantages of the highest intellectual culture, and of the elevated standpoint they occupy, less competent to determine what political relations will be most conducive to the present and prospective welfare of this Colony than we,—in our isolated

position and with those insular idiosyncrasies that are rarely corrected except by a liberal education and transatlantic travel,—are to decide for ourselves? Does not such an overweening conceit of our powers of discernment and political vaticination assume, to a sober and unbiassed judgment, very much the appearance of infatuation?

I am neither advocate nor apologist of what is styled the *Quebec* scheme, in *all* its details. I merely assert that its fundamental principles and noble object are worthy of all acceptance by every People and Parliament in Eastern British America. It has already been subjected to the most searching examination, and in some of its aspects, no doubt, modified so as to meet the views and secure the acquiescence of deputations to the Colonial Office from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. The authors of that scheme never claimed infallibility; yet, whatever may be its defects, as a *tentative* programme, not authoritatively issued, but humbly submitted, not stealthily wormed into practical developement, but frankly and ingenuously thrown open, for years, to the gaze of the public eye, it is marked in the estimation of those preeminently qualified to form an impartial and just appreciation of its merits, by statesmanlike ability of a high order. And, from the harmonious adjustment of some of its details, to which Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, in the first instance, took exception, there can exist no doubt that had the Government of Prince Edward Island

been represented, as it ought to have been, in the negotiations of those who adopted a more enlightened policy, the result would have been that the momentous question would now be in a state to be brought before the new Parliament, under conditions much more auspicious than can possibly accompany its presentation. It is our own short-sighted pertinacity that has precluded those advantages and facilities that might have paved the way to a solution of every difficulty surrounding the subject, by the coming Parliament, in a way alike satisfying to the minds and promotive of the interests of the entire population of the Island. Our Government resolved, unhappily and most unwisely, not to entertain the overtures of Union under any conditions, and have, in consequence, lost a most propitious juncture for procuring the ready acquiescence of the other parties to the compact, in all our reasonable requisitions.

Singularly enough, however, it falls out that the Leader of the Government, at whose door lies the largest amount of responsibility for that sad oversight, is now found arrayed on the side of Confederation, and has actually become one of its most zealous advocates! Has he too been won over to the theory he so sturdily opposed when in power by some golden premium on corruption? Is he to be suspected of having, when in England, listened to the seducing promises of unprincipled diplomatists, and entered into fellowship with men who have unanimously resolved to immolate on

the altar of the Confederation, as the only garlanded victim that can appease the wrath of the gods, this picturespue and productive Island?

To be serious: here is a man of undoubted intelligence, of peculiar shrewdness, and, as every body must admit, a clever man of business withal—a man whose predominating prejudice against the contemplated Union of the Colonies, refused, for a long time, to listen to reason or remonstrance on the subject—who, in the fervor of his zeal and the firmness of his purpose, did not hesitate to risk the tenure of office, or, in the contingency of a change in public sentiment, the forfeiture of the confidence of his constituency.

We now behold this same gentleman, with a valuable stake in the country, and unchanged in his intention to link the fortunes of himself and his family with its *future*, coming forward to refute his own arguments, and to counteract the regretted influence of those views to which he previously gave all the sanction of his influential example and all the weight of his uncompromising advocacy. How happens it, I ask, that a change so decided has come over the spirit of his dream?

The problem is one of no difficult solution. He has, since then, been brought into contact with minds of comprehensive grasp and far-seeing penetration. Collision, by eliciting brighter and broader views of the whole subject, in all its affinities and connections, has resulted in coalescence; and honest conviction and the love of his

country now impell him manfully to avow his change of sentiment, and to recommend to the people of this Island at large prompt and hearty concurrence with a plan, demanded by the exigencies of the present crisis, for the union, consolidation, and defence of the Colonies of British North America, under the impulse of enlightened loyalty, and the benign auspices of British supremacy.

Am I to be told that all this is but special pleading—in the hackneyed phraseology of Junius, ‘declamation without argument and assertion without proof’? Is the gratuitous outcry of *unfair* and *oppressive taxation*, whiningly reiterated by designing politicians for popular effect, sufficient summarily to dispose of those and all similar considerations? Is it peremptorily demanded by the opponents of the proposed Confederation, that before we take a single step in that direction, the entire financial scheme for the sustentation and working of the embryo-nationality shall be everything that the most selfish inhabitant of this Island can covet? I have, assuredly, no objection that we ply every argument and use every legitimate effort to obtain, at the very outset, the most favorable pecuniary terms in our power; and I certainly regret that we have lost, wholly through our own fault, a signal opportunity, the wise and energetic improvement of which might have gone far to dissipate the illusion by which, on this topic, the minds of thousands are

rendered so morbidly sensitive. If this course, so obviously the dictate alike of conventional propriety and common prudence, had been taken, for aught any one can tell (with the facts now before us in reference to the spirit in which the claims of other provinces have been responded to, I would rather say, *who can doubt* that), concessions, both with respect to Representative influence and fiscal advantage, might have been obtained sufficient to propitiate every class of Her Majesty's subjects,—those alone excepted whose political proclivities are not calculated to inspire the highest confidence in their fealty as British Colonists?—a class which, if it exist amongst us at all, is, we rejoice to believe, as small as it is uninfluential.

But too much importance may, after all, be attached to the purely commercial aspect of the question of Confederation. Constitutional law and the actual administration of law, too frequently, as history mournfully attests, widely differ. A financial arrangement, ostensibly favorable in the highest degree to the interests of this Colony, might, possibly, by a corrupt system of management, be so thwarted as to completely disappoint the anticipations of the class of political economists among us, who confided in its operations to diffuse over the whole land the opulence of the golden age. Those sticklers for the preliminary fractional adjustment of every imaginable pecuniary claim, immediate and contingent, before committing ourselves to the proposed compact,

forget meanwhile that there exists an *unprinted* code of the laws of natural and eternal justice—a statute book more plain and popular than any tome of Parliamentary legislation—a code photographed on every man's conscience by the radiant finger of God—imperatively coercive without the aid of legal penalties, and ubiquitous without the expense of distribution, and that in every civilized country the fundamental maxims of that code are faithfully reflected by *public opinion*. Were the anticipated Confederation at this moment a fact—did this Colony now feel herself surrounded by the zone of a new Colonial constitution, embracing in the amplitude of its circle every Province of British North America, and did we feel, in our novel relations, the pressure of inequitable and grasping exactions on our limited resources, are there no men among us able to make the halls of the central Legislature reverberate with the thunder of their denunciations against the shameless outrage; and scathe, with the bolts of their indignant crimination, its guilty perpetrators? Have we no *Gray* nor *Coles*, no *Hensley* nor *Haviland*, no *Pope* nor *Brecken*, no *Whelan* nor *Davies*, to bring to the vindication of the claims of their injured country powers of argument and appeal that would command attention and wake responsive echoes on the most august arena of political contest? And how long a period would elapse, think you, after the unconscionable procedure was held up to public execration, before the Queen

and Parliament of Great Britain would interpose to wipe the foul blot from the escutcheon of their Colonial empire? Away then with such pusillanimous and baseless apprehensions that we are about to be whelmed in the vortex of the Confederation!—that if we go into the measure we are destined to be stripped of our rights and to sink rapidly into a state of squallid pauperism. Narrow, indeed, must be the sphere and feeble the powers of his vision, who can descry nothing but shadows, clouds, and darkness resting upon the dynasty of a vice-regal government in British North America, in its language, laws, and literature, constitutional liberty, social order, and Christian faith, reflecting the image, and emulating the honors of its illustrious ancestry.

I will confess to you, so far am I from participating in such desponding views, that, with the very prospect of such a dynasty, the day dawns, and the day-star of a more brilliant career of prosperity than Colonial life on this side of the Atlantic has ever witnessed, arises in my heart. Let these isolated Colonies only marshal themselves in firm phalanx, under the auspices and supreme rule of the British scepter, and that moment a wall of defence is thrown around them more impregnable than that which girds the empire of China,—that moment the problem of the perpetuity of our connection with the monarchy and constitution of England receives its proud and practical solution,—that moment an era of de-

velopement in every sphere and department of useful activity, professional, commercial, and industrial, opens upon these Colonies, to the magnificent progression of which the human imagination can assign no limit,—in fine, that moment every heart that beats true to the constitution of the realm, every bosom that glows with the blended fires of patriotism and loyalty, will prompt the animated apostrophe to the scepter grasped by the hand of a Queen the virtues of whose character command the homage of our affection, while the majesty of her rule claims the allegiance of conscience,—ESTO PERPETUA !

Have we well weighed the consequences of imperiling, by our supine apathy or unreasonable perverseness, the high privileges which, as Britons, we enjoy? What nation under the whole heaven exults in the possession of such chartered immunities and blessings as, in the good providence of God, fall to our lot as a civilized and christian people—blessings and immunities for which humanity everywhere yearns, but which, in their purity and plenitude, distinguish above all others those who dwell under the shadow of the British throne? Who, not smitten with judicial blindness, would exchange those privileges for the fluctuating fortunes of a Republic, that has recently given a partial solution of its boasted theory of Government, in a fratricidal war of prodigious magnitude, issuing in the premature excision from among the living, of not less than

a quarter of a million of its sons, the flower and hope of their country, and thousands of them the only staff and stay of tottering age, and nerveless infirmity? Who would transfer the basis of his highest temporal hopes from the serene abode of dignified and inviolable freedom, to the verge of a volcano, whose crater may be fringed with verdure, but whose bowels inclose elements of terrific energy that, at any moment, may break forth and cover the land with their desolating lava?

Fellow subjects: no selfish or unworthy motive has prompted this appeal to your reason and conscience as men, and to your patriotic and loyal impulses as Britons. I disdain that science of the bar-room and the streets—*party politics*. But I can not—nor do I desire to divest myself of intense solicitude for the honor and interests of this colony, when I contemplate the hostile attitude which it somewhat preposterously presents to a magnificent scheme, intended to embrace in one common brotherhood, for the defence of their common heritage, the whole of British North America—a political compact from which, I firmly believe, Prince Edward Island has everything to hope and nothing to fear.

Let me earnestly entreat the yeomanry, who constitute the strength and sinew of the population, to scrutinize the grounds of their opposition to a measure urgently called for by the exigencies of the present crisis. Carefully sift and analyze every intelligent and relevant objection to it which

its most ingenious and indomitable opponents have contrived to array against it, and see whether they are not, with equal diplomatic dignity, courteous contempt, and suggestive emphasis, characterised in the last published dispatch from the Colonial Office as positively *trifling*. Hasten to rescue your country from the humiliating plight in which contending politicians have placed it. Hail the proposal of the closest alliance and confederation with your sister Colonies as a boon of priceless value, most opportunely soliciting your acceptance. Embrace with open arms and glowing heart the great elementary principle which is to form the corner stone of the majestic fabric; and abandon not your minds to the perturbation of unfounded fears as to the apprehended effect of the measure upon your funds and families. Place some confidence in the justice and magnanimity of the Imperial Government, under whose auspices you have hitherto enjoyed so large an amount of political quiet and happiness; and which, rest assured, has no intention whatever, on the introduction of the proposed change in some of your political relations, to deliver you over a helpless prey to the voracity of rapacious neighbours. Beneath the shield and shadow of the same throne you shall still continue, notwithstanding your immediate connection with the new Colonial dynasty, to repose in security. All your constitutional rights will be as much respected as ever, and even more vigilantly guarded than, under the old

regime, they well could be. Indeed, it is among the objects of the paternal solicitude of the Imperial Government, in promoting the speedy inception of the new order of things, to secure to you, and to your descendants, in perpetuity, *all* those rights and privileges, without the inconvenient necessity of referring, on questions of local and colonial interest and collision, to a transatlantic tribunal for authoritative, and sometimes unavoidably very tardy, decision.

Permit me, in bringing these remarks to a conclusion, to announce it as my profound conviction, in which I am far from being alone, that the coalition, at no distant day, of this Island with the confederation of the Provinces, is, to every intelligent observer of the signs of the times, distinctly foreshadowed by the course of events,—that, in point of fact, it is the palpable *predestination* of Divine Providence. Fortunately for ourselves, we may as reasonably hope to dam up the waters of the gulf that surrounds us, as to arrest, by our impotent opposition, the progressive career, or preclude the happy consummation, of the magnificent design, in whose programme we are embraced, and in whose complete practical evolution and accomplishment, we shall undoubtedly assume our destined and appropriate position, as an integral part of the great Anglo-American commonwealth.

Instead then of being ignominiously dragged into the Union by the stern logic of uncontrollable events, let us enter it spontaneously, and with as

dignified a bearing as we may now assume, after seeming to say, by our inertness and equivocal attitude in relation to the clearly indicated wishes and policy of the advisers of the Crown, that we were willing to peril the richest heritage we possess ourselves, or can transmit to posterity—the *civil and religious liberty of British subjects*.

This, whatever certain speculative or prejudiced theorists may imagine, is assuredly no trivial consideration. At a period when the despotisms of continental Europe are trembling in the balance—when no political prophet, however gifted, can anticipate with tranquil confidence the events of a single week—events which, in their consequences, might soon ensheet the fairest portions of the old world in the mantling flame of revolutionary violence, or of a general war; at a period when the passions of conflicting parties in the adjacent Republic appear to be intensified almost to the point of explosion, and the unresting fluctuations and tumults, that would seem to be inseparable from the genius of its institutions, are so ominous of its coming destinies, it is no easy calculation to estimate the advantage of living under the ægis of an Empire with whose power and grandeur, (in the words of America's greatest statesman and most powerful orator *) Rome, in the height of her glory, was not to be compared; and of which one of America's most accomplished and zealous missionaries in the East did not hesitate publicly to testify, that the extension of its influence is the best

* Webster.

guarantee for the spread of the principles of constitutional liberty and Christian civilization.

Gentlemen of the House of Assembly and Honorable Members of the Legislative Council, placed by your position and your promises under the most sacred obligations not merely to promote the well-understood *legitimate* wishes of your respective constituencies, but to exercise your utmost influence to rectify their obliquities and misapprehensions, and guide their opinions on all questions vitally affecting not their interests alone, but the welfare of the entire population of the Island, you sustain, at this critical juncture, a most onerous responsibility, and the gaze of millions on both sides of the Atlantic is intently fixed upon you, to mark in what *spirit*, and with what *wisdom*, that responsibility shall be met. It rests mainly with *your* agency, *unintelligently* or *wisely* exercised, to determine whether, for a series of years, this colony shall be consigned to an abject and abnormal condition of dreary isolation, or, springing from its recumbent, inglorious lethargy, and shaking off the incubus that has terrified the imaginations of so many with all sorts of spectral monsters, shall ascend, with cheerful and elastic step, the eminence to which our incomparable Queen is affectionately beckoning you, to survey an inheritance of almost illimitable extent, teeming with every element of enterprise and wealth and well being, to be added at once to your tiny, insulated domicile, unless indeed, with pitiable pu-

erility and ineffable ingratitude, you spurn the sceptered hand that holds out to you the munificent donative. Hear me, I beseech you! Should the new Parliament and Administration, like their predecessors, throw *trifling* obstacles in the way of the proposed Confederation, they are destined in all probability to die in official infancy; or, in the contingency of their contriving to survive for years, they will most certainly transmit their names to posterity not illustrated with a halo of honor, but signalized by demonstrated incapacity to appreciate what are not simply the exigencies but the *imperious requisitions* of the eventful epoch of their accession to influence and power. We hope better things of you; and await with mingled emotions of cheering hope and trembling solicitude the development of the Gubernatorial policy that must in a very short time either increase the humiliation, or issue—and Heaven grant it may!—in redeeming the periled honor and promoting the elevation of this small yet in various aspects most interesting and important colony, and setting it forth, in fraternal union and friendly emulation with its kindred colonies, on a happy-omened career of unprecedented prosperity.

In concluding this appeal, it may be important to allude, at least conjecturally, to the position in which we shall be placed as a colony, in the event of the unqualified rejection by the newly-elected House of Assembly, of the final deliverance of the Imperial Government on the subject. If New-

foundland enter the confederation—and of that there exists scarcely the shadow of a doubt, we shall remain in our cold and repulsive isolation—without the countenance or sympathy of a single sister colony. Nor is that all : we shall compel those who direct Her Majesty's councils to do that which they strongly deprecate—not indeed (in contravention of their avowed purpose) to *coerce* us to become a constituent branch of the Confederation, but, to assign us a relation to it far less desirable than an honorable partnership. It seems preposterous to imagine that when the other Colonies come under a local *regime*, a department in the Home Government will still be kept up, solely for the accommodation of this Island. Such an expectation is too extravagant to be entertained. Who then can contemplate the alternative without humiliation and shame ! Do we prefer subordination to equality?—a relation of suppliant dependence to the conscious dignity of full participation in the control, the honors, and the advantages of a potent Vice-Royalty ? That certainly were a species of voluntary humility, revolting to every sentiment of becoming self-respect—a sacrifice without even a *show* of wisdom to disguise its imbecility.

Whatever may be the issue, I shall never, I trust, have cause to regret the presentation of this unostentatious offering to the unity and consolidation of British North America,—the field of my labors for almost half a century. Fully aware that on the subject of this Plea, the sentiments of my

best personal friends are divided, my profound conviction of the truth and importance of the views I have announced, alone has overcome the reluctance which I naturally felt to displease any of them. On whichever side of the question their judgment at present may range them, none of them, I apprehend, will be disinclined to accord to me the claim of sincerity. In any event, no one *can* rob me of the satisfaction I derive from a consciousness of the rectitude, benevolence, and patriotism of my design in this exposition of my opinions on a topic of assuredly *no evanescent* interest; for when the agitations of the present generation concerning it have subsided into the solemn quiescence of the sepulchre, the course they now take in reference to it, will leave its impress—it may be for ages—on the destinies of the living.

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